

History of Drinking Water Week

For 18 years, Drinking Water Week has been celebrated during the first full week of May (Sunday through Saturday). Beginning in 1988, the American Water Works Association (AWWA) brought the event to the attention of federal government and formed a coalition along with the League of Women Voters, the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators, and the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Prior to this, the AWWA dedicated a specific time in May to celebrate safe water in America since they became established in 1881. AWWA is the oldest and largest nonprofit scientific and educational organization dedicated to safe drinking water in North America.

Rep. Robert Roe and Sen. Dennis DeConcini in 1988 sponsored a resolution to name the first full week of May as National Drinking Water Week and an information kit was distributed to the media and to more than 10,000 utilities. Willard Scott, the Today Show weatherman, was featured in public service announcements aired between May 2 and 8.

The week-long observance was declared in a joint congressional resolution and signed by then President Ronald Reagan.

The following year in 1989, AWWA approached several organizations to participate. Through these efforts, the National Drinking Water Alliance was formed of 15 nonprofit educational, professional, and public interest organizations. The Alliance dedicated itself to public awareness and involvement in public and private drinking water issues, and continued its work to organize a major annual educational campaign built around National Drinking Water Week.

The power of the multi-organization Alliance enabled National Drinking Water Week to grow into widespread and committed participation throughout the United States and Canada. In 1991, the Alliance launched a national campaign to inform the public about America's drinking water. The group distributed a kit containing ideas for celebrating Drinking Water Week, conservation fact and tip sheets, news release and posters. The theme was "There's a lot more to drinking water than meets the eye."

Due to the popularity and wide usage of the initial materials, the Alliance elected to create a stronger recognition and in 1992 created a valuable symbol, the "Blue Thumb", to serve as a focal point for the next campaign. While having a "Green Thumb" symbolizes the ability to nurture plants, "Blue Thumb" signifies care of water resources.

The Blue Thumb symbol provided an identity that has proven extremely valuable in building enthusiasm for Drinking Water Week and it helped the campaign grow dramatically. By 1994, more than 400 organizations across the country participated in Drinking Water Week, including affiliates of the Alliance partners, community groups, libraries and schools. The media campaign generated more than 800 newspaper placements reaching an audience of 12 while a cable TV show reached an audience of nearly 10 million. Additionally, a public service announcement featuring Elaine Miles of the CBS-TV show Northern Exposure was also distributed to stations across the country.

In 2000 members of the Blue Thumb Alliance unanimously agreed to discontinue the Blue Thumb Project and Blue Thumb Kits. Given the decision to end the project, AWWA has placed all of the information and resources the Blue Thumb program provided on the Drinking Water Week web pages.

While the Blue Thumb name and Blue Thumb kits no longer exist, AWWA is committed to continuing the campaign to raise public awareness and understanding of drinking water. By providing easily accessible and frequently updated information through the Internet, more individuals, communities and utilities are able to promote Drinking Water Week.

In 2005, the AWWA established an ongoing theme for Drinking Water Week, which is "*The Wonder of Water*". This will allow utilities and organizations to use materials for more than just one year. AWWA has applied for trademark on this theme to ensure its Drinking Water Week use for years to come.

AWWA, through their Advocacy Web site, offers celebration ideas, materials, promotional opportunities and other tools to help spread the word about The Wonder of Water. Visit AWWA's Web site at <http://www.awwa.org/Advocacy/dww/>.

Previous Themes for Drinking Water Week:

- ✓ There's a lot more to drinking water than meets the eye
- ✓ Give drinking water a hand
- ✓ Protect, get involved, conserve
- ✓ Let it be 2nd nature

- ✓ Spread the word for water
- ✓ Exercise your blue thumb
- ✓ Drinking water counts on you
- ✓ Ride the water cycle
- ✓ Celebrate water
- ✓ Water Works Wonders
- ✓ Water Works Wonders
- ✓ The theme The Wonder of Water will serve as the ongoing theme for Drinking Water Week.

REFERENCE: American Water Works Association. 2006. History of Drinking Water Week,
<http://www.awwa.org/Advocacy/dww/General/History.cfm>.